

29th Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle C, 10.20.19

Exodus 17: 8-13; 2 Timothy 3: 14-4:2

Luke 18: 1-8

PRAYER - AS NATURAL AS BREATHING

This week, along with a couple of hundred other people, I started a novena praying for the healing of Oblate Tom Murphy who was recently diagnosed with stomach cancer which has already spread to some other organs. I will continue the prayer beyond the nine days of the novena. I will continue it until he is healed or until he dies. Either scenario will be an answer to my prayer.

Honestly, I do not expect a miracle healing, though I believe and hope one is possible. So why pray? Because the act of praying opens my heart and mind and helps me to change my attitude from my will be done to thy will be done. Too often we may approach prayer like a Google search, expecting an instant and favorable result to our query. Or, we may see prayer like ordering a pizza which we expect to be promptly delivered while still warm and made according to our specifications. Prayer is not like that.

Prayer is effective. Prayer always changes us, even if in tiny ways, because prayer places us in the presence of our God who loves us and cares for us and already knows our needs and desires. We can no more be in the presence of God and be unaffected than we can stand in bright sunlight and be unaffected. At minimum we will get a little warmer! Prayer reminds us that God remains with us and is attentive to us. Prayer helps us to see the countless occasions we have each day to grow in virtue and to turn away from sin. Prayer enables us to gratefully embrace the gift of each new day as it comes to us.

The gospel today speaks about praying without growing weary. The most important thing to get out of the humorous story in the gospel today is that God is nothing like the judge in the parable. If God is anything like either of the two characters, God is more like the untiring widow because God is relentless, never gives up and keeps coming back to us. God is our advocate who will make sure that justice is done. And are we not at least at times like the indifferent judge not really caring about justice for others or our spiritual lives

until we become afraid of getting a black eye or until God's persistence finally gets our attention and we finally listen and find some peace in our hearts and in our lives?



Everything we do, our every outward action, affects an inner change. Every time we lie or cheat or hate, it changes us. Every time we forgive, resist injustice, take a risk or love, we are changed. We are called to learn to love as our God loves us, to forgive one another as our God forgives us and today we are challenged to be as persistent as our God is persistent with us. Whether it is convenient or inconvenient, we are called to persist in proclaiming the Word of God and to persist in our prayer. Persistence is difficult for us. But with God's grace, through reception of the sacraments, by study of the scriptures, by prayer and by supporting one another we may persist and complete well our personal race.

Praying is more than merely uttering words or kneeling or singing. Francis de Sales said: *"The essence of prayer is not to be found in always being on our knees, but in keeping our wills clearly united to God's will in all events."* Our prayer is offered by the way we live our lives. Prayer should be as natural to us as breathing and as spontaneous as a

feeling of wonder and we should not stop as long as we are drawing a breath.

We learn how to pray by praying. Through prayer we gain the humility to acknowledge where we've been, the gentleness to accept where we are and the courage to consider where we need to go. It is almost always when we stop praying, when we take back from God the very things we have tried to give over to God and try to resolve them ourselves, often acting out of fear or anxiety, that we usually cause problems for ourselves or make a situation worse rather than better.



Granted, it is often a difficult and challenging life which we live. Even with the many joys with which we are blessed, there are tough times for everyone. None of us can make it alone. We need God and we need each other. We need to persist even when it is not convenient. We need to really care for each other and not stop even though we make mistakes or fail again and again. Who quits a sport because you lose one match or even two? Just as Moses needed help to hold up his arms when he got tired and they felt heavy and he needed Joshua and the army to fight the battle while he prayed, so, too, we need each other to help us carry our burdens, our crosses, and sometimes to fight some battles.



For all our bragging, questions, doubts, failings, apathy, laziness and sins, we are still beloved by God. With God's grace may we allow God to wear us down. May we be aware enough to offer assistance to one another when our arms become weary. May we be persistent in our believing, in our hoping, in our forgiving and in our loving. And may we pray without growing weary, always proclaiming the Gospel whether it is convenient or not. May God be blessed.



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